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# Livestock Grazing Successes on Public Range





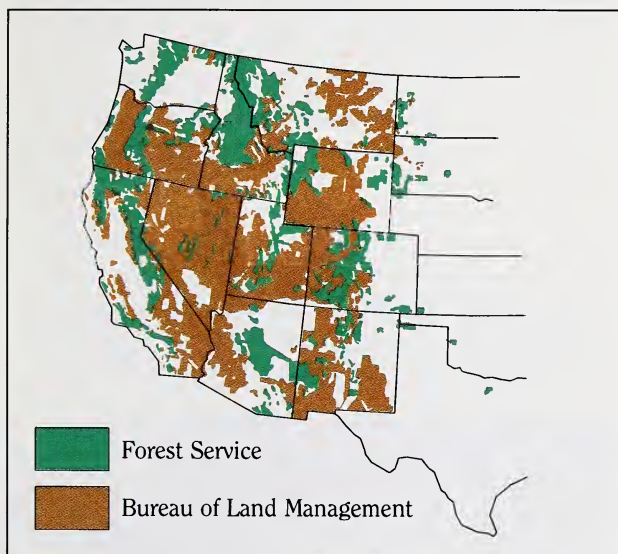
**THE STORY OF CATTLE AND SHEEP GRAZING**  
on the Nation's vast Federal lands, mostly in the Western United States, is a colorful and important part of America's heritage. Today, 100 years after the cattle and sheep drives and range wars that figured so prominently in the settling of the West, livestock grazing continues as a valid, authorized use on public range.

Livestock grazing produces food and fiber, along with many other environmental, economic, and social benefits. To achieve range management objectives, Federal land managers and ranchers are working as partners on range allotments all across the West, using livestock grazing as a vital tool to improve riparian areas, associated uplands, and entire watersheds.



## Federal Role

In the West, the early settlers generally homesteaded the lands with the most water and forage, while vast areas of often remote, desolate, and arid lands remained in public ownership. As a result, the Federal Government still owns 724 million acres, almost one-third of the Nation's land. Because of homesteading laws, railroad grants, and other factors, Federal, State, and private lands are now often intermingled, and cooperation among landowners is vital.



Over the years, Congress has passed a number of laws directing the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Department of the Interior, to administer Federal lands under a multiple-use concept, for a variety of uses. The two agencies manage about 341 million acres of public range. Multiple-use values on these lands include range vegetation, soil, water, timber, minerals, wildlife habitat, recreation, historic and prehistoric resources, wilderness, scenery, open space, and a rural way of life.

Range conditions suffered in the early 1900's because of drought and overgrazing, but better management practices and regulations have vastly improved the range. Today, range scientists, Federal managers, and livestock producers generally agree that public rangelands are in better condition than they have been since the turn of the century, and they are still working together to improve them more. In addition, the

growing public interest in range for recreational use, wildlife habitat, esthetics, and other values continues to focus attention on improvement needs.

The management of livestock grazing and all other uses of Federal lands is governed by comprehensive land use plans, prepared by resource specialists, with public review and comment.

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## **Permittee Partnerships**

Today, approximately 31,000 grazing permittees work as partners with the BLM and the Forest Service in managing cattle, sheep, horses, and goats on Federal lands in 35 States. Most run family-owned farms or ranches. All operate according to Federal leases or permits that control the number of livestock and duration of grazing. About 13 percent of these permittees use both Forest Service and BLM lands.

Allotment management plans are worked out with permittees to make the best use of forage and maintain soil, water, and vegetation while meeting public demands for other multiple-use values. These plans can be complex, and their success relies heavily on cooperation between permittees, Federal managers, and others.



The Public Lands Council represents the ranchers who graze livestock on Federal lands in the Western States. It monitors, initiates, and coordinates action on public land issues affecting livestock permittees. The Council works in close cooperation with other groups to further the principles of multiple-use and long-term conservation. It is supported by and coordinates with the National Cattlemen's Association, the American Sheep Industry Association, and the Association of National Grasslands.

## **Livestock Grazing for Food and Fiber**

Livestock grazing provides beef, lamb, leather, wool, and other products that are important to local, regional, and national economies. Fully 50 percent of the Nation's marketable lambs and 20 percent of the calves going to feedlots are raised in the western public land states.

A big share of the livestock raised in the Western States grazes at least part of the year on Federal land. For example, 88 percent of the cattle produced in Idaho, 64 percent in Wyoming, and 63 percent in Arizona graze on public range at some time. Overall, Federal lands produce approximately 13 percent of the grazing forage in the United States.

## **Livestock Grazing as a Resource Management Tool**

### **● Vegetation**

Grazing is used to maintain or restore plant communities. It also promotes the diversity of plant life. For range grasses to thrive, they must be cropped to promote vigor. Often, the lack of grazing results in unhealthy, less dense stands that overwhelm good grasses, wildflowers, and other plants. Livestock and other animals break up the soil crust, increasing rainwater penetration and scattering and trampling seeds into the earth.



### **● Soil and Water**

Water is precious, especially in the West. Proper watershed management aims to capture, store, and safely release water. By managing the timing and duration of

livestock use, grazing helps improve grass and crop production, control erosion, recharge aquifers, enhance riparian conditions, and provide water for recreational, agricultural, and other needs.

### ● **Wildlife Habitat**

Range improvements for livestock grazing can increase wildlife numbers and improve habitat, especially in areas with little rainfall or running water. Over the years, Federal agencies and livestock operators have built thousands of stockponds and waterholes, which benefit both livestock and wildlife.

Salt distribution, brush control, grass seedings, and predator control also benefit wildlife species. Big game numbers are generally increasing as a result of these and other improvements.

Intermingled private ranch and farmlands, which contain open spaces and often boast rich riparian habitat, also provide critical food, water, shelter, and protection for wildlife.



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## **Livestock Grazing for Rural Needs**

### ● **Community Stability**

Livestock production is a major industry in the West, providing jobs and income for rural communities and generating millions of dollars for regional economies. The social and economic existence of many of the small towns that dot the West depends in part on livestock producers who operate on Federal lands.

Public land permittees are an important part of their local tax base, providing employment and patronizing businesses in town for feed, equipment, gasoline, and supplies. In addition, ranchers on public range pay fees to the Federal Government, which are shared with local

counties for roads and schools, go to the U.S. Treasury, or are used for range betterment projects.



### ● A Way of Life

Rural families, often living far from town, represent a cherished American way of life. Wide open spaces, long days, hard work, an affinity for the land and what it can produce, shepherds in sheep wagons, and cowboys on horseback are still a way of life for many; and they serve as images of America for people throughout the world.

Federal grazing permittees are part of rural western America and are neighbors to remote Federal lands. In addition to managing their ranch operations, these permittees are often on hand 24 hours a day, including weekends, to help stop poaching, vandalism, and fires, or to aid people in distress.



## Success Stories

There are many examples of successful Federal and permittee partnerships that illustrate the benefits of livestock grazing. Some involve persistent, long-term efforts to improve vegetation in extreme climates; some deal with intense competition for other uses; and some are very complex, requiring negotiation and cooperation with other landowners and interest groups. All reflect the importance of partnerships to set goals and ultimately improve rangeland quality.

A single grazing plan, developed in cooperation with the 44-member Sugarloaf Grazing Association, guides range vegetation management on 93,000 acres of the **Oglala National Grassland in the Nebraska National Forest**. Sixty-three allotments were combined into 36 grazing units, reducing the need for fencing and water structures and resulting in a savings of \$150,000. The plan calls for continued grazing, emphasis on stream



banks and wooded draws, and measures to provide habitat for grouse and prairie dogs. Significant improvement of riparian conditions now provides more cover for wildlife. Better range vegetation helps meet public demand for recreational opportunities, such as viewing wildlife, hunting waterfowl, or simply enjoying the solitude of wide open spaces. The success of the plan is nationally acclaimed, making it a benchmark example for others to follow. For its outstanding contribution to cooperative range management, the association received the Forest Service Chief's Range Award in 1989.

Every year from June 1 to 15, cattle are purposely grazed in the riparian area of the **Pass Creek Allotment of the Canon City BLM District in Colorado**. Then, the permittee moves the cattle in alternate years to one of two pastures on adjacent uplands, where the abundant forage encourages them to remain. Frequent herding and well-placed water troughs keep the cattle on uplands until July 15, when they move to another pasture. After 10 years of this system, with no reduction in livestock numbers, willow growth has greatly enhanced bank overhand and shading, vastly improving brook trout habitat. Dense vegetation remains in the creek overflow area to help control high water and collect sediment.



On the **Pierce Allotment of the Miles City BLM District in Montana**, a five-pasture grazing system is used, with one pasture receiving complete rest each year. Livestock movement through the four grazed pastures is determined by the soil moisture, climate, plant growth, and number of livestock. Before 1968, bare ground, soil erosion, low plant vigor, and very few desirable plant species were evident. Since then, the permittee has cooperated by moving stock more often. Now, remarkable regrowth of coarse grasses in draw bottoms has resulted in less runoff and improved watershed. There has been a sustained high forage yield for livestock, even during severe drought years. Vegetation diversity and density have increased markedly, providing excellent habitat for antelope, sage grouse, and nongame wildlife.



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The **Deep Creek Allotment on the San Bernardino National Forest in California** receives heavy use by recreationists on foot, on horseback, and in off-road vehicles. They are attracted to a State-designated Wild Trout Stream, which is also a water source for grazing cattle. Hot springs and archeological sites are other attractions, and the Pacific Crest Trail parallels a portion of the stream. The inevitable competition for resources required a team approach to resolve the intense conflicts. By working together, the grazing permittee, State and Federal agencies, and local interest groups devised a plan that has enhanced cooperative relations and improved cattle distribution, while protecting the stream. To make the plan work, the Sierra Club, the Deep Creek Flyfishermen, and the California Department of Fish and Game joined forces to build fences. The State also assisted and offered drilling equipment for water projects. The permittee installed a cattleguard and drift fencing, using Forest Service materials. The permittee also rides the allotment regularly during the summer to herd cattle away from Deep Creek, where fishing and other recreational activities continue to increase.



After a lightning fire in 1978 destroyed 2,000 acres of mixed conifers on the **Tahoe National Forest in California**, the Forest Service replanted seedlings that soon became smothered by chaparral brush. Rather than destroy the brush with chemicals or costly heavy equipment, Forest Service managers worked with a local woolgrower to introduce 800 head of sheep, which grazed the brush but left the seedlings untouched. Today, the forest is growing back healthy and strong, and wildlife numbers are rebounding due to a successful partnership.



On the **Bare Allotment of the Susanville BLM District in Nevada**, a rest rotation grazing system has been in operation since 1971. The allotment consists of nearly 200,000 Federal acres, with 8,500 acres of private land scattered throughout. It contains two perennial streams and is used by 3,000 head of yearling cattle between April 15 and October 15 each year. The permittee is a large corporation whose managers have worked persistently with BLM to negotiate and carry out a combination of rest rotation and deferred grazing from May to July. The allotment is divided into six pastures, some receiving early and late use every year and some grazed one year and rested the next. To make the system work, fencing and additional water developments were put in place. Before 1971, grazing use was season-long every year. Grass species were heavily utilized and displayed very poor vigor. Now, a bigger diversity of grasses is apparent, plant vigor is significantly improved, and stream banks show excellent recovery. All are beneficial for livestock, wildlife, recreationists, and overall watershed conditions.



On the **Whiterock Soapstone Allotment in the Arizona Strip BLM District in Arizona**, a management system was begun in 1967, consisting of pinyon-juniper chaining, burning, perennial grass seeding, and a four-pasture rest rotation grazing system. Now, sustained yield of high-quality livestock forage, better winter forage and habitat for mule deer and nongame wildlife, improved watershed quality, and more pleasing and diversified esthetic qualities are evident. Two successive permittees have worked cooperatively with BLM over the entire period to make the grazing system work and add water developments, while BLM carried out land treatment projects. In the arid Southwest climate, it is a real accomplishment for perennial grasses to be well maintained and thickened. The gradual increase of bitterbrush also adds forage for deer.



The number of elk wintering on the **Wall Creek Allotment in the Beaverhead National Forest in Montana** increased from 6 in 1935 to 1,200 in 1987. The Wall Creek Stock Association, consisting of seven permittees, ran cattle on the allotment. On the adjacent Wall Creek Game Range, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks became concerned that elk did not use some areas and that forage quality had declined as older plants developed. They began to experiment with livestock grazing to improve range condition and forage-use patterns. Now, the Forest Service, the stock association, and the State of Montana have one coordinated grazing system for all the allotment and refuge lands. With additional fencing, pipelines, and water developments, nine pastures have been set up at low, middle, and high elevations. Movement of livestock is synchronized with plant growth cycles — uphill in the spring and downhill in the fall. Permittees now get their cattle off hayfields earlier in the spring and off National Forest land before fall storms, and their season is a month longer. Changing elk-use patterns are notable, cattle are spreading out to previously ungrazed areas, and regrowth of vegetation is increasing.



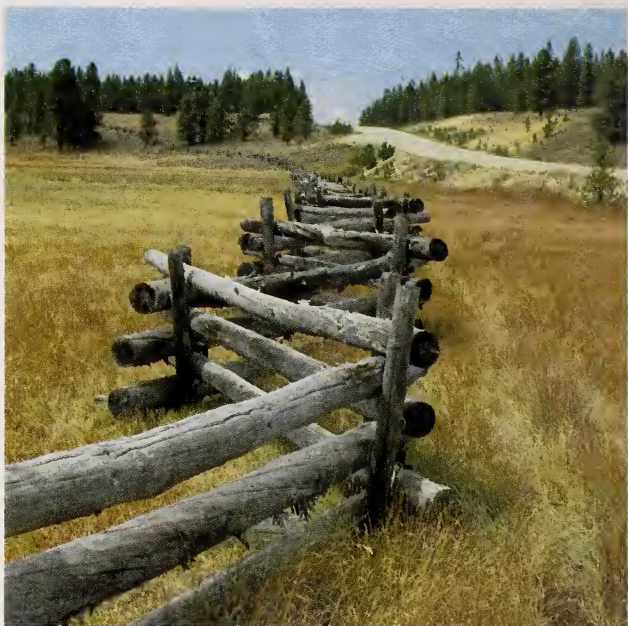
On the **Johnny Creek Allotment of the Safford BLM District in Arizona**, a three-pasture deferred rotation grazing system has been in operation since 1983. Even with a slow response to vegetation management, typical in the Southwest, a dramatic visual change has occurred. There has been a definite increase in the density, cover, and production of grass and brush, bringing benefits to livestock, wildlife, and watershed. The apparent upward trend is due to a persistent effort by BLM and successive permittees since 1965. In progressive steps, an allotment management plan was developed, improvements were added, some pastures were deferred from grazing, and a phased reduction of livestock over a 3-year period helped build plant vigor. After 6 years, monitoring continues to show an increase in vegetation cover.



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On the **Tonasket Ranger District of the Okanogan National Forest in Washington**, tree plantations were not performing well. Grass competition and stems bruised from grazing were suspected causes. Trees had been planted with little regard for grazing use in the same areas where range grasses were sown. Permittees were confused about where and when to graze their livestock. As a result, range, silviculture, and ecology personnel joined forces in 1987 to develop seeding guidelines. Then, grazing criteria, fencing, water, salting, and herding by a volunteer rider were agreed upon by permittees in allotment management plans. Field trips were held to locate plantation grazing sites and clarify objectives. After two seasons, all participants have learned that integrated management and the use of livestock as a tool make sense. Now, under the watchful eye of an experienced plantation rider, both cattle and seedlings are thriving.





**PARTNERSHIPS** with Federal grazing permittees, are nothing new; but the effective working relationships, the range improvements, and the multiple-use benefits of livestock grazing have often gone unnoticed.

Changing public values and demands bring complexity and focus attention on the need for cooperation among all users of rangelands. Successful partnerships between permittees, State, and Federal managers form a strong base on which to build a positive future for the public range.



## **For More Information**

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Produced in partnership by:

The Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management,  
and Public Lands Council



**United States Department of Agriculture**

**Forest Service**

**Program Aid Number 1439**

**September 1989**